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BY

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CIRCUMCISION AMONGST SOUTH AFRICAN NATIVES

BY

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The principal ceremony in the life of the boy, of most native tribes is that of circumcision, and there are many details connected with this rite which are of importance to those in professional contact with natives.

Circumcision is a custom of great antiquity. Donelly (Atlantis) states that the rite dates back to the first days of Phoenicia, Egypt, and the Cushites. It was probably an Atlantean custom, invented in the Stone Age and even though the ages of copper, bronze and iron have intervened, *to this day the Hebrew rabbi performs the ceremony of circumcision with a stone knife.*

Professor G. Elliot Smith also found that the male bodies in the prehistoric cemetery at Naga-edder were all circumcised, and in a tomb of the ancient empire at Takkara, where the operation of circumcision is represented in a series of wall pictures, the surgeon *is using a flint knife*. These pictures were carved 2,000 years before the time of Rameses II. (B.C. 1310-1248), and the bodies of prehistoric men had been circumcised a thousand years before the pictures were carved, hence it is evident that the rite of circumcision existed at least 4000 B.C.

The origin of the rite can only be surmised. Some ascribe it to mere utilitarian motives. Thus Donelly says it was imposed as a religious duty to arrest one of the most dreadful scourges of the human race. Others believe that it is used as a tribal mark in the same manner as tattooing or knocking out the front teeth, but it should be remembered that tribal marks are generally placed on exposed and conspicuous parts. Phallic worship as a reason has also been mooted, the idea being that it was looked upon as an offering to the deity of fertility, while others again think it a substitute for human sacrifice. The fact the Egyptian priests were circumcised proves that it was not looked upon as a mark of slavery or subjection but rather of nobility and superiority.

Its geographical distribution is very wide, for it is practised by the inhabitants of the West Coast of Africa, Christian Abyssinians, the people of Madagascar, the Polynesian Islanders, the people of the Malay Archipelago, the Aborigines of Australia, the natives of parts of America and the pygmies of Central Africa.

The disciples of both the Hebrew and Islam religions practise the rite, and concerning the latter creed it is interesting to note that the word circumcision is not once mentioned in the Koran. On this

point Hughes, in his dictionary of Islam, says : "Circumcision, Arabic Khitan, Khitanah or Khatnah is not alluded to in the Koran." The omission is remarkable and Moslem writers do not attempt an explanation. It is, however, held to be founded upon the customs of the Prophet and to date its institution from the time of Abraham. There is no authentic account of the circumcision of Mohammed, but it is asserted by some writers that he was born circumcised. This, however, is denied by most eminent scholars.

In former days all the Bantu races were circumcised, but Jobe, a Zulu king and father of the celebrated Dingiswayo, stopped the practice among his people because he found that the circumcision ceremonies, or schools as they are called, interfered with his military camps.

For the same reason probably the M'Pondo and part of the M'Pondomise tribe also ceased carrying out the rites. Nowadays we have all the Zulu races uncircumcised, namely, the Zulu, Shangaans, Angoni, Swazi, with the M'Pondo and part of the M'Pondomisa, while the other tribes all observe the rite.

AGE OF OPERATION.

The age at which the operation is performed varies. For example, the M'Xosa do not observe the rite until the boy is approaching manhood, that is until he has grown up, and is capable of doing a man's work, and of taking an active part in the affairs of the tribe. The Bapedi perform it between the ages of 15 and 17 years, those natives under Arabic influence, at 12 or 13 years, while the Inhambane and Mytopi natives appear to have no particular age and a circumcision camp in those parts contains boys of ages ranging from five to thirty or even forty years. Other tribes again observe the rite in infancy or early childhood.

In the same way the age varies among outside races. For example, the Hebrews are particular to perform the operation on the eighth day (Genesis, chap. xviii., v. 12). The Mohammedans recommend that it be observed between the ages of seven and twelve years, but at the same time it is considered quite lawful to circumcise a child at seven days after birth.*

* The age at which circumcision is performed amongst Arabs, viz., at the age of 13 years, is probably due to the fact that Ishmael was 13 years old when he was circumcised.

"And Abraham took Ishmael his son and all that was born in his house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins, and Ishmael was 13 years old."—Genesis, Chap. XVII., v. 23-25.

They, however, make the somewhat curious concession, for, as Hughes says, in the case of a convert to Islam from some other creed, in whom the operation may cause great suffering, it can be dispensed with, although it is considered expedient and proper for all new converts to be circumcised. In all cases the adult is expected to circumcise himself, as it is a shame for an adult person to uncover himself to another.

TIME OF YEAR FOR PERFORMING THE CEREMONY.

Among the Bantu races the rites are observed at the beginning of the winter, that is at the time when the harvest has been gathered, and there is a period of feasting.

When it has been decided to carry out the ceremony, a number of camps (known in parts as "Soka" camps) are chosen, capable of holding varying numbers of boys. These camps are placed in charge of a native doctor, a man generally of some importance, selected from the chief's kraals, though the local doctor may act as his assistant.

The ceremony creates a kind of brotherhood among the boys belonging to each camp, and for this reason, when a chief's son is to be operated on, it is customary to get as many boys as possible in his camp, so that he may have a large following.

The following is a description of the ceremony as I saw it performed amongst the Mytopi people in Portuguese East Africa :—

After making the necessary arrangements with the native doctor for our admission, we were taken by one of the headmen through the bush to the entrance of the camp. Here several posts were stuck into the ground, on which a grass ring was placed for each boy as he entered the camp. (See Fig. 1.)

Although it is usual to signify the number of boys in a camp by means of these grass rings, in some districts deep notches are cut in the side of a tree instead, leaving marks like a series of small steps on its trunk.

The camp covered a large area of bush, and in the centre, well concealed from the main roads, were temporary dwellings for the boys to sleep in. The kind of sanctum to which we were admitted consisted of a lean-to shelter, about 50 yards long, running down one side of a clearing in the bush. Only a small part of one end of the structure had a front wall. On the poles supporting it were hung tobacco leaves, kaffir pianos, calabashes and other domestic utensils. There was a small round hut at one side, probably for the doctor to live in, and in the centre of the clearing were several trees, giving plenty of shade, under which fires were made. There were several M'Pimbe* kraals for goats, and a number of chickens were also kept in the camp. (See Fig. 2.)

We were met by the kaffir doctor and an induna, and were immediately surrounded by a crowd of boys of all ages and sizes, who had already been operated upon. They wore only bark blankets (*umshala*), and among them were a certain number

of visitors, who had been circumcised on some previous occasion, and who seemed to find the camp a convenient loafing place. All the uncircumcised were absolutely forbidden admission.

We sat under the trees and discussed general matters, and the circumcised boys described their various ailments.

At first we were informed that they would not operate on any one until the next day, but after some discussion between the medical man and the induna, they decided to send out for two boys at once, and after some waiting a messenger informed the doctor that the two boys were outside. Thereupon he began operations. He first placed a small quantity of two powders, one black, the other white, which he took from two small calabashes, into a clay pot full of water, and put this on the fire to boil. After the mixture had been on the fire for a little time, he led us to a small circular clearing, about 12 yards in diameter, only a few paces from the main camp, but hidden from it by bushes. On the one side of this was a thick hedge, about 5 feet high, constructed in the shape of a half moon, in the centre of which was a small hole just big enough to let a man pass through if he stooped down almost on to his hands and knees.

The doctor took up his position in the centre of this place, where a small hole had been made in the sand. He laid out his instruments, consisting of a collection of razors; he also took a pinch of black powder from a small calabash, some of which he put into the hole, and with the rest he made a smudge on each side of his face, and afterwards passed his blackened fingers through his mouth, or touched his tongue with them. In the meantime, a drum, made out of an old bark beehive, was being beaten vigorously and a couple of kaffir pianos were played noisily, and the assistants danced round the doctor, singing the whole time. Two boys were placed in a kneeling position, one on each side of the small hole in the fence, while others were sent out to drive the boy to be circumcised through the hole. The patient, in this instance a man, was driven through the opening. He came in with a rush, absolutely naked, and evidently worked up to the highest pitch of excitement. He reminded one of a bullock running into a slaughter yard, not knowing in which direction to charge. Before he could make up his mind what to do, he was tripped up from behind by the two boys waiting at the entrance, his legs were pulled from under him, and he was carried to where the doctor was kneeling, placed on his buttocks with his legs apart, and his penis hanging over the small hole in the sand, at the same time being firmly held by several assistants.

Before the unhappy man had recovered from this procedure the doctor seized his foreskin, and having carefully pulled it forward so as to prevent the possibility of the glans being cut, he leisurely sawed through the outer layer of the skin. This he pulled forward, cut off, and dropped into the hole in the sand. (Some native doctors have a forked stick into which they slip the foreskin to protect the glans, before they commence cutting). The mucous membrane was then slit in the middle line with a razor,

* M'Pimbe—*Garcinia Livingstonei*, a tree with many spikes on its branches.



FIG. 1.—POLES AT ENTRANCE OF CAMP, WITH GRASS RINGS USED TO COUNT THE PATIENTS.



FIG. 2.—VIEW OF INTERIOR OF CIRCUMCISION CAMP.

separated from the glans very thoroughly, and afterwards trimmed off close round to the *frænum*.

This part of the foreskin was also put with the first into the hole, into which the blood had also been allowed to drip.

One of the assistants then brought a bowl of water, in which there were some leaves finely chopped up, and while the doctor held the back of the razor against the pubes the solution was poured over the blade, so that it run over the penis and scrotum into the hole, after which the insides of both the thighs of the patient were slapped with the flat of the razor and the actual operation was finished, the patient being led into another small circular clearing behind the bushes and out of the sight of any other boy coming in for operation. Here he was seated on the ground, his legs apart, with a piece of stick across his thighs over which his penis was suspended so that the blood dripped into a hole in the sand. He was allowed to rest here while another boy was driven into the first mentioned area, and operated on in the same way. The two patients I saw operated on were father and son, the father, a man, of about eight and twenty, the son, a piccanin of five years. The father winced once or twice during the operation, but the piccanin neither struggled nor showed the slightest sign of pain or fear, and seemed to take a highly interested view of the operation on his person. When both had been operated on, the doctor came to superintend the dressings. Before the boys were again touched, however, each was given by an assistant a decoction of some leaves to drink, out of a wooden bowl, each took a long draught, and were urged to imbibe copiously.

The medical man meanwhile washed his hands very carefully several times in hot water. He then saw that the skin of the penis was all right, and from an earthenware bowl, already referred to, and now containing a nearly boiling decoction, he took a linen bag, probably filled with astringent herbs of some kind, and squeezed it over the bleeding surfaces. This was undoubtedly an exceedingly painful proceeding, and a hand had to be put over the patient's mouth to prevent him from crying out.* However, the hot lotion was quickly followed by some cold water, and a dressing of leaves gathered from the bush, called "umgasho" (of the same order as the india-rubber tree) was prepared. These leaves exude a white juice when broken, and are warmed at a fire to make them soft and pliable, and the midrib is carefully stripped off. Three or four of the leaves were laid overlapping one another and half an inch of their bases was bent over a piece of bark string, and they were then wrapped round the penis, so that their apices protruded beyond the end of the glans. The string over which the bases of the leaves were bent was used as a binding to keep them in place; it was wound neatly round the organ to within half an inch of the glans. The apices of the leaves were

then pulled together and tied up with a piece of fine bark twine, and any portions protruding were cut off, put into the hole into which the blood and lotions had been running and the hole covered in.

This produced a very neat dressing, which, I was informed, was not changed for three days, and in some cases the organ is further supported by a piece of string tied round the waist. (See Fig. 3.)

After the operation a fowl was given to the doctor for each boy operated upon.

The patients were now allowed into the main camp, where they were given an "umshala" blanket, their other clothes having been burnt. The boys living in the camp, who had already been operated on, lined up to receive them, and they joined in a song in which they cursed all women as whores and generally anathematized the opposite sex.

To revert. The ultimate fate of the foreskins seems to vary according to the medical man in charge of the camp. I was unable to see what happened to those removed in my presence, but the doctor assured me that he buried them in the sand. This he may have done, but it is not always the practice to do so.* He told me that he killed the

* It is interesting to note that this, the more or less use of a fowl as a sacrifice, occurs in not one, but several of the ceremonies of the Bantu people, and on referring to the Bible one notes that the sacrifice of birds was quite common. See Leviticus, chap. 1, v. 14; Genesis, chap. xv., v. 9; Leviticus, chap. xii., v. 6-8; Leviticus, chap. xlvi., v. 4.

It is true that the birds referred to were turtle doves or young pigeons, but as the Rev. G. A. Cooke, M.A., in his Text Book of North Semitic Inscription, says in his footnote to page 120:

"So far as date goes, there is no reason why the common domestic fowl should not have been sacrificed in Carthays. It was first introduced into W. Asia by the Persians, too late to be included in the sacrifice lists of Lev. i., but it may have reached North Africa by the fourth or third century."

This may be a point worthy of consideration to those endeavouring to trace the origin of some of the Bantu customs.

The following extracts demonstrate how widespread the sacrifice of fowls is:—

After marriage in British Central Africa the sureties of the husband and wife meet, and more or less fix up the agreement. There is a beer drink, and the surety of the husband kills a cock, while those of the wife kill a laying hen.

—*Africana*, Vol. I., 139.

Among the Hebrews in Germany the married couple's first meal consists of milk and honey. Salt was sprinkled in the house. In Tarmalka two hens are carried before the couple, and after the wedding a chicken is placed before them.

—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

In Cascasus, during part of the marriage ceremony among the Hebrews, the mother must prepare for the couple a cock and hen, or all the bride's chickens will be stolen and killed.

—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

Sir Harry Johnston describes how among the Atonga, on the west coast of Lake Nyassa, on the first day following marriage, the girl's father brings two fowls, a cock and hen, and should give the hen to the bridegroom's father to keep, saying, "You have my daughter, I have got your son," but if for any reason the bride's father is dissatisfied with his son-in-law, he gives the cock to the man's father, as a sign that he returns the son, and will not have him as a son-in-law. If the hen is given, however, the marriage is considered as settled.

The Rev. Dennett (*Back of the Black Man's Mind*), when describing the initiation ceremonies of females of the Kongo, states that at the first signs of puberty the maiden's family rejoice. The men fire off their guns. The girl is isolated in a small hut outside the town. Her hair is shaved off, her whole body is covered with Takula, or the powdered red wood mixed with water. Thus painted, the maiden returns to the little hut. Here she is presented with a fowl, or, if the family cannot afford this, an egg.

* This procedure possibly accounts for the patches of leuco-plakia of the glans seen in so many circumcised South African natives.

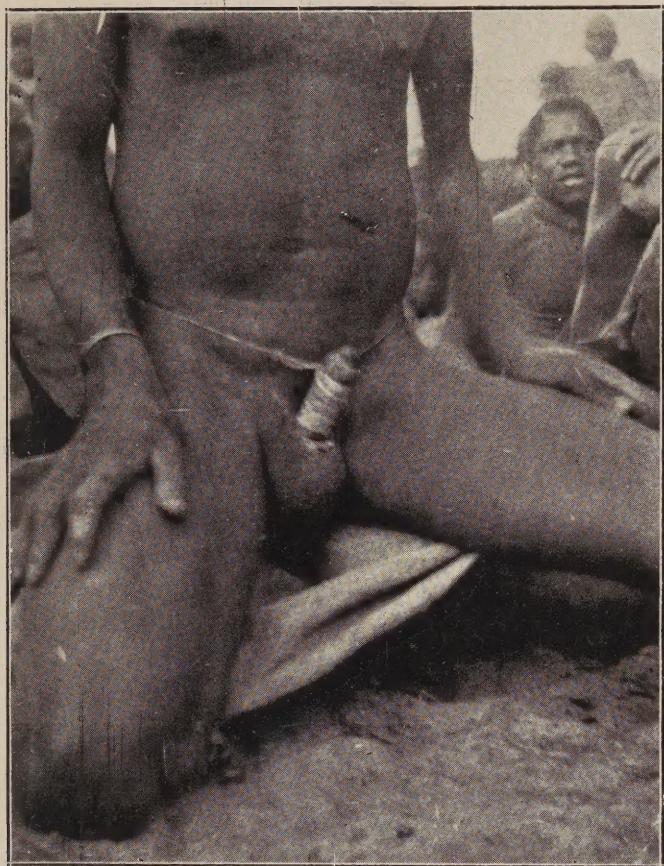


FIG. 3.—OPERATION COMPLETED, SHOWING THE FIRST DRESSING.

fowls, thrust the blade of the razor into the flesh, and then roasted the fowl with the razor in it. Afterwards, the boy who had brought the bird into the camp ate a small part of it, but most of it was eaten by the medical man and his assistants. The killing of the fowl is supposed to prevent the patient becoming bewitched, and the roasting carried out with the razor prevents him getting chest complaints.

In other camps, a slit is made in the back of the fowl, and into this the foreskin is pushed, then both foreskin and fowl are roasted almost to ashes, ground up between stones, and mixed with water, which mixture the patient has to drink.

On other occasions, it seems that the foreskins are cooked separately from the fowls, and are ground up, but the medical man takes the resulting powder, and uses it for medicine for other patients.

While the camp is being held, the neighbourhood is continually disturbed, especially at night, by the noise of the kaffir piano and drums, which are beaten for the boys to dance to, in order that by so doing they may forget the pain they are suffering.

All patients are supposed to remain in the camp until everyone is healed, and while there, are not supposed to wash. When everyone is ready to leave,

they have to make grass shields for themselves, one of which comes down over the face, with holes for the eyes, another round the waist, and one round the shoulders. So disguised, they form a procession, carrying in their hands white sticks about 10 feet long, which are ornamented with markings burnt on them, and with banners and rattles at the end. A number of rings are also burnt on the sticks, representing the number of weeks the boy has been in camp. Dressed in this manner they march back to their kraal, singing a lewd song to the women, and on arrival, sit in the centre of the kraal.

It is at this point that the boys change their names (in the same way among the Israelites, and, among the Arabs, a new name is tacked on the old one).

It is the duty of the mothers of the various boys to come and recognise their sons, while they are still disguised. If a woman picks out the wrong boy, she has to give him a present. When she has found her son, he tells her the new name he has chosen, and it is her duty to call him aloud by it. She has also to present him with a new outfit of clothes.

After this performance is finished, they remove their disguises and there is a feast, and the circumcised boys are supposed to be allowed sexual access to any of the women of the kraal.

The ceremony as described above is actually as I saw it performed, but there are numerous other matters of interest in connection with the rite.

In the first place, women are absolutely prohibited within the precincts of the circumcision camps. I was informed that if a woman entered a camp, even if she did so accidentally, she would be caught by the doctor and his assistants, taken away into the bush and killed with sticks.

At the same time, it is the women's duty to cook food for the camp. This is done in the kraals, and is taken to the entrance to the camp, where the poles with the grass rings are. When they reach the poles, the women shout until they are answered from the camp. Directly this is done, they run back to their kraals for fear they should be seen by any of the men.

*While the circumcision ceremony is going on, the men are not allowed to cohabit with their women, as it is believed that if they did so the children in the camp would get sick. The fate of the female transgressor to this last regulation is a severe one.

Further having once erred in this direction, she is in disgrace, and is not allowed to cook any more food for her children in the camp. The male transgressor may, in some cases, have to pay a fine to the chief, but he is forbidden to enter the camp again under any consideration, and if he does so, he is thrashed until he is nearly dead, and then thrown out.

Should one of the boys in camp get sick, it is taken for granted that his mother is the responsible

* This peculiar regulation is observed by other tribes. Mr. C. A. Wheelright, C.M.G., refers to it among the Bawenda. It is also enforced to a certain degree among some of the Central African natives.

According to the Mosaic law cohabitation is also prohibited during certain days of the mourning for the dead.

person. She is forced to go to the entrance of the camp and to confess in a loud voice all that she has done. She must admit if she has bewitched her son, and she must confess if she has had intercourse with anyone since the camp was formed. The men in the camp who have been circumcised on previous occasions listen to her confession, and when she has done, they shout that she must be beaten, and chase her back to the kraal, belabouring her as she runs.

Among the older women, a practice used to obtain of burning a mark on the right arm on each occasion that they sent a son to the circumcision camp, but this custom is falling out of use, and is by no means general. My attention was drawn to the practice by marks on a woman's arm, which I mistook for vaccination marks.

Among the M'Xosa and Pandomisa tribes, in the Cape Colony, circumcision is performed in much the same manner as among the natives on the East Coast, but there are some variations in the customs observed, which are worthy of note.

The following is a brief, but, I believe, absolutely reliable account of the manner in which the rite is performed, which is interesting as a means of comparison.

In the first place, as stated before, it is not carried out until the boy is from 17 to 20 years of age, that is, until he is a man and able to take his own part. The circumcised boy is known as "indoda," while the uncircumcised, even though he be an adult is still referred to as an umfaan or kwedin.

The circumcised M'Xosa looks upon the uncircumcised adult boy with contempt, referring to him as a pig, and no way considering him a man (much in the same way as the ancient Hebrews referred to the uncircumcised as "arelem").

Among the M'Xosa, those to be operated on are collected in a camp capable of containing from 10 to 20 boys. For each boy* that goes into the camp there is a cow and a calf kept for milking purposes, and nearly all the food is prepared in the camp; cattle, etc., being killed there. Women are, as on the East Coast, strictly prohibited admission. If a woman did enter a camp, she would in the old days certainly have been killed.

While in the camp, the boys are subjected to a good deal of hardship; they are beaten, etc., so that they may become hardened and fit to bear the responsibilities of adult life.

Livingstone describes how when at Bamangwato he saw a part of the ceremony as performed among the Bechuanas. Just at dawn of day a row of boys about 14 years of age stood naked in the Kotta or circumcision camp. Each had a pair of sandals as a shield on his hands. The men, also naked, were arranged opposite them, armed with long rods of moretloa (*Grewia flava*). They commenced a dance known as Koha, during which they asked the

boys questions, such as "Will you guard the chief well?" etc. As the boys give the affirmative response, the men rush forward and each aims a blow at the boy opposite to him. The boy shields his head with the sandals and causes the supple wand to descend upon his back. Every stroke makes the blood spurt from a wound a foot or eighteen inches long.

The M'Xosa boys, as is the case with other races, elect a chief, generally the son of a man of some importance in the district. All of them are operated on, on the same day, the chief selected being circumcised second, so that should there be any accident at first it will not be he who dies.

After the operation, which is performed with an assegai, the penis is dressed with leaves, which are changed daily.

The foreskin after removal is buried in an ant heap.* I am informed that on the first occasion that the boy has priapism after being circumcised he goes and thrashes the place where his foreskin has been buried. The origin of this custom is difficult to understand.

The patient is painted with some white mixture, made of clay. (This practice of painting the boy, while he is in the circumcision camp is of interest, as we find that in Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen's work, "The Native Tribes of Central Australia," it is stated that during the Australian initiation ceremonies, the boys are painted, their bodies are rubbed all over with grease and are then decorated with pinkish white clay and birds down.) He then has to wear a very heavy kilt, and a mask made of ferns obtained from near the seashore. As soon as the boys are healed, their sweethearts are allowed to join them, sexual excesses are permitted, and they have to commence a series of dances in the districts, known as "Abakwetta" dances, which last for about six months, with the idea of making the boys physically strong. While dancing, the boys are accompanied by girls, who beat drums made of bullock skins, and sing songs specially composed and reserved for this ceremony, some of which, but not all, are indecent.

The day the boys first leave the camp is an important one, and it is considered an honour for the boys to go to a person's kraal to dance. They generally select a wealthy man's kraal, where they know they can get a beast killed for them, and plenty of kaffir beer.

They dance every day, but return each night to their camps, and, though they are not supposed to do so, they spend a lot of time hunting buck and birds.

When the period of dancing is over, the hut and all the boys' clothing are burnt, for everything must be destroyed. Kidd says: "Everything they possess is piled in a heap, taking care to include every shred of bandage or material used during the two or three months, and the whole set on fire, lest some

* The calf is kept for the purpose of inducing the cow to give her milk. Many South African cows will not give their milk unless the calf has first sucked. Much the same thing occurs, or did occur, in the Highlands of Scotland. Should the calf die, its skin was stuffed with straw, and used as a substitute. This stuffed skin is known as Tulchan or Tulchin.

* Among the Ancient Hebrews the foreskin was either buried or burnt. However, among modern Hebrews it is often preserved.

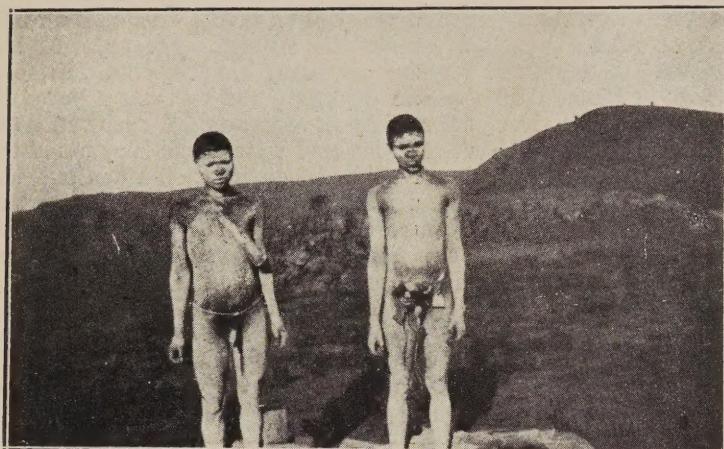


FIG. 4.—TWO M'XOSA, PAINTED WHITE, DURING THE CIRCUMCISION CEREMONY. NOTE THESE BOYS ARE WEARING NCEUTYI MADE FROM PERICARDIUM OF SHEEP.



FIG. 5.—SAME BOYS IN THEIR BLANKETS.



FIG. 6.—AMAQUETA DANCE. BOYS DRESSED IN HEAVY GRASS, ALREADY DESCRIBED.

enemy should get possession of anything connected with the rite. If a magician can get possession of any article used by the boys during the period of isolation, there is no limit to the evil he may not work."

The day their clothing is burnt they have at daybreak to race, quite naked, to the nearest water and wash off the white clay.

While running to the water, they must be careful not to look back at the camp. After washing off the clay, they go naked to the kraal of the chief boy, generally the kraal of the boy's father, where they receive their fresh clothing. A big feast is provided, and the councillors and principal men give them advice. It is explained to them that they are now men, and must act as such; they must not do "boyish things"; they must fight for their people; see that they have plenty of food; must never give their backs to their enemies, and must never be without an assegai and knife in their huts, etc.

At this time they change their names in the same way as described among the East Coast natives (Mtyopi and Myambaan). Kidd explains that the natives have two names—one (Igama) given in infancy, which corresponds to our Christian name, and another (Isibongo) which corresponds roughly with our surname. The latter is not given until the child has passed the age of puberty. This name may have a prefix, which indicates his clan, and the fact that it is not given until after puberty shows that a child is not regarded as an organic part of the clan until it reaches adult life. In those tribes in which circumcision is practised at the age of sixteen or seventeen, the second name is given at that ceremony.

Amongst the Zulu people, who, as stated, have abandoned the rite of circumcision, the chief used to call up the boys at about seventeen years of age, and publicly give them a second name. But in recent years even this custom has lapsed.

As with the Myambaan and Mtyopi tribes, so with the M'Xosa natives there are a number of superstitions in connection with the circumcision ceremony. For example, if it is found that a boy's wounds do not heal satisfactorily, it is believed that this is because he has at some previous time been guilty of incest in some form, and it is thought that he will not heal properly until he has confessed to this in full in much the same way that an Arab boy has to confess to the Iman before being operated on.

Among the other African tribes we find practically the same customs observed. For example, Joseph Thompson, speaking of the Wa-taveta, says they have amalgamated their ideas and customs with those of the Masai (Wa-kwafi). Among other things the manner of circumcision proper to the Masai is maintained.

Dr. Copeland, of Mafeking, who for some years practised in Uganda, tells me that the Masai do not remove any portion of the foreskin when they circumcise, but slit the dorsal surface, and through this aperture they force the glans penis, the prepuce consequently remaining an unsightly lump on the under surface.

John Boyes, in his book "King of the Wa Kikuyi," gives a description of the circumcision rite as practised among the Kikuyi. He says on the day fixed for the ceremony the boys all turn out some time before daylight, and are taken down to the river, where they have to stand for half an hour up to the waist in ice cold water until they are absolutely numb and cold. They are then taken out, led to the operator, who almost completely severs the foreskin with two cuts of his knife, then folds the severed portion back, and secures it on the under surface with a thorn driven through the flesh. The boy then returns to the village and rests for a few days until the wound is healed. No boy is supposed to utter a sound during the operation, and it is probable that the numbing effect of the icy bath prevents their feeling any or very much pain.

"A Masai child cannot be circumcised until the father has observed a custom called 'the passing of the fence.' The man who wishes his son to be circumcised brews honey wine and collects his neighbours. A hut is usually built for the father outside the kraal, where he stays for four days (alone), food, etc., being brought to him. During this time he only approaches the kraal to attend his cattle, and during this period he wears the clothes and arms of a warrior. At the end of four days, the elders go and bring him back to the kraal, and he takes off his warrior's gear, and the wine is drunk. He is for the time called by his son's name; for example, 'The father of so-and-so.'"

The following is the mode of procedure for the boys:—"When the time for circumcision arrives, the boys collect cattle and honey and go to the kraal to the medicine man. Having obtained permission to hold the ceremony, they enjoy themselves and paint their bodies with chalk. They visit different kraals for the next two or three months, after which they return home until circumcised, and it is at this time they choose one of their number to be their councillor or spokesman."

"Ceremony.—The boy is first shaved, and a bullock is slaughtered. On the second day he cuts down a tree, which is carried by the girls to the kraal, where it is planted at the door of the hut. On the third day he sits outside the kraal at early dawn and gets cold. He washes himself in water in which a fern (*Asparagus sp.*) has been soaked, and later, when the sun is well up, his mother opens the gate of the kraal and fetches an ox hide which she places on the ground by the right hand door-post. The boy sits on the hide, and the operator, with a man to hold the boy, circumcises him. If the boy winces during the operation, the mother is beaten with sticks. If the parents know that the boy will behave like a coward, they go away and hide themselves. After the operation, the boy carries the blood-stained hide, on which he has been operated, to his bed, and remains at home for four days. During this time a bow is prepared for him, and he sallies forth and shoots at young girls with arrows, the points of which are covered with pieces of honeycomb. They also shoot small birds, the heads of which they wear round their necks, and wear long clothes and ear-rings like girls, and paint their faces white. When they have recovered, they are shaved again, and discard the long garments for a warrior's skin and ornaments. From this time forth their hair is allowed to grow, and as soon as it is long enough to plait, they are called Il Muran (Warrior)—a word commonly, but incorrectly, written Eimoran."

"They have what are called 'ages.' Children are not circumcised together. They are divided into ages. First of all the big boys are circumcised, while the smaller ones wait until they reach the age of puberty. Those circumcised first belong to what is called the right hand circumcision, and that is one age. The younger ones who wait, and who are operated on later, also become members of this age. When the next circumcision festivals are held, those circumcised belong to what is called the left hand circumcision, and that is the next age. The younger ones wait as before, and when they are circumcised they likewise belong to this age. Now the two ages are equivalent to one generation. Each age has three divisions: (1) Those known as 'The Big Ostrich'; (2) those known as 'The Helpers'; (3) those known as 'Our Fleet Runners,'"

Mr. C. L. Harris, in his report on the Bapedi, gives a description of their circumcision rites, which resemble those of the M'Xosa and other tribes in all the essential points, so we need only mention one or two of them for example.

While in camp, the Bapedi boys are beaten three times—the first time, to impress the duty of *obedience to the chief*; the second, *that of obedience to their fathers*; and the third, *that on no account shall they obey their mothers*.

Among these people, the same contempt for an uncircumcised male is shown as among the M'Xosa, as Mr. Harris says “a Leshuburu,” that is, an uncircumcised man, may not have intercourse with a woman, and should he seduce a girl of the kraal, the penalty, in the time of Tulare, was death, and an abortion of the woman was produced.

If we consider briefly the corresponding ceremonies, as they obtain among the people in other parts of the world far removed from South Africa, we find the underlying principles are the same.

It is evident that they possess one common origin. The similarities are not confined to the African races, certain prominent features are common in many parts of the world, quite removed from Africa, for example in India.

Hughes describes circumcision as practised among the Mohammedan Indians which may be of interest for purposes of comparison.

Circumcision as practised by Mohammedans in India is performed in the following manner:—

A bit of stick is used as a probe, and carried round and round between the glans and the prepuce to ascertain the exact extent of the fraenum, and that no unnatural adhesions exist.

The foreskin is then drawn forward and a pair of forceps, consisting of a couple of pieces of split bamboo, five or six inches long and a quarter of an inch thick, tied firmly together at one end with a piece of string to the extent of an inch, is applied from above in an oblique direction, so as to exclude about an inch and a half of the prepuce above and three-quarters of an inch below. The forceps severely grasping the prepuce causes a good deal of pain, but this state of suffering does not continue long, since the next thing to be done is the removal, which is done by one stroke of the razor drawn directly downwards. The haemorrhage which follows is inconsiderable and easily stopped by the application of burnt rags and ashes.

From a medical point of view, the one thing most noticeable in the camp which I visited was the cleanliness with which the medicine man operated, and consequently the results obtained were excellent. I looked carefully among the inmates of the camp, but I did not see one bad result; none of them had enlarged glands, or showed other signs of septic poisoning. On the day following my visit I had an opportunity of questioning the doctor quietly.

He informed me that he always kept patients with gonorrhœa till the last, as he was afraid

of using his instruments on others after he had operated on them. Where the man acquired his knowledge it is difficult to say, but he may possibly have been a hospital orderly somewhere, and I am inclined to believe this to be the case, as he asked me for some “medicine” to put in the water before he washed his hands.

Unfortunately, the results elsewhere are not always equally good. From some camps I heard fearful tales of the after-effects of circumcision. In one district, two hundred boys got septic poisoning of some kind or another.

It seems very probable that the septic poisoning would have a debilitating effect on the boys, which would be felt for some months, and that though they might appear to be fairly well, they would break down with any unusual strain.

Of course, no one doubts the benefit of circumcision, when it has been performed cleanly and successfully, but syphilis is occasionally conveyed from one boy to another by the knife of the operator. Deaths from haemorrhage do occur, but they are exceedingly rare, as the native medicine man has a fairly extensive knowledge of styptics.

While in the circumcision camp, the boys belonging to some tribes are subjected, as has already been stated, to great hardships. They wear no clothing, and are made to sleep in the open without blankets, sometimes during severe weather, besides being thrashed unmercifully at intervals. It is quite possible weaklings may die simply from exposure and rough usage.

At all events, there is no doubt that fatal results do occur, possibly more often than is generally supposed, because the natives do not make the knowledge of such fatalities common property. For example, among the Basuto, when a boy dies in a circumcision camp, the matter is not mentioned. Some one comes from the hills where the camp is situated, and without saying anything to the parents of the boy, smashes all the son's pots and drinking vessels. The parents recognise this as a sign that their boy is dead, that they will not see him again, and there the matter ends.

Missionaries are now teaching the natives that baptism takes the place of circumcision, consequently many mission natives are uncircumcised. Such boys, when travelling in the vicinity of a circumcision camp, are very liable to be caught, dragged inside, and operated on against their will, a procedure which one would think renders travelling for the uncircumcised unpleasantly exciting.

As a result of the missionaries setting their face against these rites, the natives have reduced the age in some instances at which the operation is performed, in order that the boys may be circumcised before they can be converted to Christianity.

The rite of circumcision of old times among the natives was a religious ceremony of very great importance, but now it has degenerated to a considerable extent.

I am indebted to Mr. Taberer, of the Native Recruiting Corporation, for the photographs reproduced in Figs. 4, 5 and 6.

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